Mark Bates

Cascadia Community College

Ethnography & Ethnology

INTRODUCTION

For my case study I chose to look at a large corporation that is very popular with a large percent of the population. The place that I chose for my case study is Starbucks. This particular Starbucks is located in Monroe, Washington and its address is 19813 U.S. 2, Monroe WA. This location of Starbucks is located in a small strip mall in close proximity to GNC, Albertsons, Jack in The Box, and Bank of America among other businesses. This strip mall is on the North East corner of Monroe whose population is over 16,000, and located in a river valley. The population is comprised mostly of blue collar workers, and a small percentage of diminishing small farm owners.

The goal of this study is to observe the people who frequent Starbucks and attempt to find an alternate reasoning why they come to this location versus other locations, such as drive thru stands or brewing coffee at home. With observations of the people that frequent Starbucks it is my hope to gather a general consensus about age, gender, and income to get a wider picture on consumers and reasons for Starbucks popularity. The hope is to see if the company is incorporated into a status symbol among people, and seen as popular of “cool” to do. I will look to answer the question; is it really about the coffee or the cup? Is this coffee really that good for the price, or do people take pride in the fact they can afford this high price coffee house on a regular basis. It seems as though some might, but that is a thought of mine personally before conduction any observation.

Methodology

This location was chose due to proximity of my home, as well as this location does not have a drive thru so all visitors will have to enter and exit through one door making it easier to observe the actions and people visiting the facility. My personal experiences with Starbucks are very limited; I am not a big coffee drinker nor are any of my close friends. I have been to Starbucks about 3 times and been to this location twice.

My analysis was conducted on a Thursday from 11:30 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. on 7/15/2010, which was a sunny day and the temperature averaged about 80 degrees. I conducted half of the observation inside and forty five minutes outside on a small sidewalk patio. I chose seats away from the door to avoid looking awkward and influencing people’s actions around me. To help fit in I purchased a drink to keep in front of me to blend in with the surroundings and crowd, as well as kept a small notebook to keep notes in front of me. In my notes I recorded length of visits, weather fast or staying for long periods of time, also noted clothes, race, age (roughly), and how many people came in groups and what size of the groups.

DATA PRESENTAION & ANALYSIS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| # OF CUSTOMERS | |
| TOTAL CUSTOMERS | 78 |
| MEN | 35 |
| WOMEN | 43 |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | AGE OF CUSTOMERS | | | UNDER 20 | 4 | | UNDER 30 | 25 | | OVER 30 | 37 | | ELDERLY (60+) | 12 | | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FREQENCY OF CUSTOMERS | |
| IN & OUT | 58 |
| SIT DOWN | 20 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| DURATION OF SIT DOWN CUSTOMERS | |
| UNDER 30 MIN. | 12 |
| UNDER 1 HR. | 7 |
| OVER 1 HR. | 1 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| USE OF TECHNOLOGY | |
| PHONES (TALK/TEXT) | 40 |
| LAPTOP’S | 1 |
| BLUETOOTH | 6 |

\*BLUETOOTH INCLUDED IN TOTAL PHONE COUNT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CUSTOMERS PURCHASING FOOD | |
| TOTAL | 15 |

Before analyzing the information collected it is important to note the day and time of the observation may have left out a large demographic of customers who were at work and could not come to this specific location due to obligations at work, distance, and traffic, which may have influenced them to not go to Starbucks. The aspects that may be questioned in this data would be the age of the customers; this data was collected by my perception and guess alone. Each individual was not asked their age directly, and the recorded information was based on the individuals looks and what age I guessed them to be. As one can see from the recorded information the total count of customers for the hour and a half was 78, approximately 55% female, and 45% male. Of the male and female customers the majority of age based on my observation was from individuals above thirty, which accounted for approximately 47% of the total amount of people. The next most common age was under thirty and above 20 accounting for 32% of the total amount of customers, followed by elderly individuals with 15% and the least prominent age of customers being under the age of 20, who accounted for only 5%. Strictly by age and sex the most prominent demographic that attended Starbucks on a Thursday from 11:30-1:00 was that of females who exceeded the age of 30 and were under the age of 60. This group of women were dressed casual but professional, and from my observations this popular group seemed to be working women on the run, most likely coming in quickly during a break and hurrying back to work.

In fact the majority of customers were quickly in and out, averaging roughly 6 minutes in the building; depending on how long the line was and how much time they took to “customize” their coffee at the small table provided. These in and out customers made the majority at 74% and sit down customers were a small share at only 26%. Of these sit down customers only one stayed longer than one hour. Twelve individuals who sat down at a table stayed under 30 minutes and seven people stayed over thirty minutes but left before the turn of an hour.

Looking at this information strictly from a numbers point of view it is easy to see the customer base age, sex, and time spent in the establishment, but these numbers leave out a lot of important information on interaction. As pointed out before a majority where in and out customers and looked to be in a hurry. These individuals seemed to be stopping en route to another location and most likely working middle class in the local area. Although some stayed, taking a seat at a table and talking with a friend or on their phones, the majority didn’t take any more time than they had to. Upon watching their interactions with the baristas it was obvious most had frequented Starbucks before. This was easily seen with a large majority of the customers who when ordering coffee didn’t even look at the menu and would simply rattle off a complicated drink name, and would then move to were the drink could be grabbed after being made. As these customers waited most fidgeted with their phones, text messaging, talking, or on the internet, none of who paid too much attention to their surroundings seeming to busy to care.

At the end of the observations and doing some number crunching, I quickly realized that my original thought of Starbucks being used as a symbol of success by the customers was wrong. Starbucks was used as an energizer more than anything else, people who were working but took the time to purchase Starbucks and deal with traffic were in an attempt to find something to re-energize them, either for the caffeine or the fact it was satisfying to them in flavor. Starbucks in this location was a crutch for many fast paced, working, and busy employees from around the immediate area who found themselves tired in the middle of the work day. Upon my arrival I had talked to the baristas who were working and asked if it was ok to conduct this study, and after seeing this I returned to ask a couple of questions about what I had seen. The baristas said that, in their opinion energy was the main reason for most coming in to purchase coffee, and told me that around the morning time and evening were the busiest times of the day, which they perceived as people coming and headed home from work. The baristas perceived weekends more for enjoyment and customers sat down more often and for longer, also consuming more food than the mild 19% that I saw for customers during my observations.

My original goal was to prove that customers use their Starbucks drink as an accessory to get acceptance, to be a part of the “in crowd” or use it as a symbol of success, drinking what was viewed as the “best coffee”. I realized after my observations that this was not the case for the majority of the people buying coffee, but instead used the coffee to obtain energy for the rest of the work day. I also thought originally that it would be a majority of women, but on this day the sexes were pretty even only favoring the women by a small number. Before conducting this observation I thought a lot of consumers would sit down and spend more time there, but I found that most did not spend more time than they had to in the facility. With little prior knowledge of Starbucks I found that at the time period I sat in the shop most people seemed to be short tempered and irritable, which may have been caused due to the nice weather and most of the people having to go back to work. So pushed for time and skipping pleasantries, most people treated getting coffee like filling up their car with gas, something that needed to be done, but didn’t really qualify as fun or enjoyable.